



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk 860-441-6640  
Town Manager  
860-441-6630

**Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Karen F. Morton, Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson**

**Tuesday, September 18, 2012**

**6:00 PM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

#### **SPECIAL MEETING**

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.*

#### **2. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Watson  
Members Absent: Councilor Schmidt

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.*

#### **3. NEW BUSINESS**

**2012-0175**

##### **FYE 2014 Budget Process**

##### **Discussed**

*Mayor Somers asked Councilors for their ideas about what they would like to do differently in the budget process. She noted that she researched municipalities that have outsourced to save money, noting that some have been very successful and others have failed miserably. The main savings appear to be associated with overhead and retirement.*

*Town Manager Oefinger provided an overview of the budget development process that starts in mid-October with departments reviewing personnel. Operating budget information is input in mid-January. The Town Manager then meets with the departments and makes changes to the budget into March. The proposed budget is distributed to the Council in mid-March and a public hearing is held at the end of March. The Council reviews the budget function by function and holds meetings with the Board of Education in April. Tentative mill rates are set at the end of April. RTM committees also begin meeting in April. The budget with Town Council changes is then reviewed by the RTM in May. The RTM is the ultimate budget authority in the Town. The role of the Town Council is to set the tone and to do the initial leg work. The time deadlines are set by the Charter.*

*Councilor Peruzzotti asked if there is any possibility of reducing the time spent on the budget by having the Town Council and RTM meet at the same time. She also suggested that the Town Council budget sessions be televised. The Town Manager explained that the Charter defines separate time lines for Town Council and RTM action on the budget, but the two groups could have joint meetings before the Town Council acts on the proposed budget, if desired. Councilors Streeter and Flax expressed support for televising the Council's budget sessions.*

*Mayor Somers suggested that the Council take a different approach by asking what the Town can afford next year and what is the critical number necessary to do the job efficiently. She feels the Council spends an inordinate amount of time trying to cut things. Mayor Somers suggested that the Council have three informal public budget meetings and invite comments to determine what services citizens are willing to give up. Councilor Flax feels those decisions should be based on a cost/benefit analysis. Councilor Johnson suggested that Councilors participate in the Town Manager's discussions with department heads. Mayor Somers suggested that citizens may not*

want any services cut and it is a matter of education.

Councilor Morton said the Council needs to know the anticipated revenues and the Council needs to prioritize the different functions in the Town. Discussion followed on revenues and when they are received. The Town Manager noted that he is conservative when developing his budget proposal. There is no way to know what the revenues will be when the budget is developed and the biggest missing piece is the state revenues so the Town uses the governor's estimates. The Town Manager noted that the increases in taxes are being driven by a reduction in revenues. He further noted that increases in the Subdivisions area of the budget have far exceeded increases in the Town Operations and Board of Education portions of the budget.

Councilor Morton feels the Town must look at duplication of services. She expressed concern with the road maintenance bond. Councilor Peruzzotti noted that if the Town Council and RTM appropriate funds for road maintenance, the amount of the bond can be decreased.

Mayor Somers feels the Town must change the way it delivers services, for example to the City and Groton Long Point. If revenues are going down, the Council must have the fortitude to cut programs and services.

Councilor Flax noted that there is never any progress when discussing consolidation of services. Citizens need to be educated. The Town cannot continue to squeeze the Board of Education and Town Operations. Councilor Flax noted he would even consider hiring a consultant to identify areas of cost savings.

Discussion followed on the status of the police study and information expected to be generated by the report. Additional discussion occurred on consolidation of fire districts and not funding the City of Groton and Groton Long Point police departments. The Town Manager explained that if the Town decreased or eliminated police funding to those entities, the Town would not automatically take over those services.

Mayor Somers suggested that if the Council is considering reducing or eliminating funding to outside library, they should be notified ahead of time.

Councilor Peruzzotti stated that these discussions are a waste of time because nobody can agree on what to cut and no one will stand up for what they believe in because they want to get reelected. Councilor Peruzzotti left the meeting.

With regard to consolidation of Town and Board of Education services, the Town Manager noted that there can always be more discussion, but there are already a number of shared services and both entities would have to support consolidation.

Councilor Flax left the meeting to attend the Historic District Commission meeting.

Mayor Somers feels that the Council, rather than micromanaging the budget, needs to give the Town Manager more specific direction such as phasing out support for the City and Groton Long Point police departments, reducing programs, and eliminating contributions to outside agencies, for example. The Town Manager concurred that budget reductions are all about programs at this point. Mayor Somers suggested that the Council also have a revenue generating discussion.

Councilor Antipas noted that labor contracts have untouchable increases. The Town Council should have a view toward what the community can afford and what the budget will look like in the future. He noted that he was not able to get the figures for the per year cost of the teachers' contract.

*Councilor Johnson suggested moving people out of the Town's retirement fund and into 401K programs. The Town Manager noted that more people are starting to use a 457 plan and the Town is in good shape from a pension standpoint. The new cost is Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB). The Town Manager feels that OPEB should be handled like a pension where employees pay into it. He indicated he can conduct a separate session on pension if desired by the Council.*

*Councilors expressed support for holding informal meetings with citizens. The first session was scheduled for Saturday, October 13th from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the Groton Senior Center. Discussion followed on a format for the meeting.*

#### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

*The meeting adjourned at 7:26 p.m.*